DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 064 439 UD 012 482

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TITLE Crosscultural Miscommunication in the Classroom.
INSTITUTION Language Research Foundation, Cambridge, Mass.
SPONS AGENCY Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE 8 Apr 72
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the joint annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology and the American Ethnological Society, Montreal, P.Q., April 8, 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Anglo Americans; Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; *Communication Problems; *Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; Cultural Factors; Culture Conflict; Failure Factors; Puerto Rican Culture; *Puerto Ricans; Student Attitudes; Student Behavior; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior
IDENTIFIERS Boston; Massachusetts

ABSTRACT

Communication between students and teachers is a basic requirement for learning to take place in a classroom. Like words and phrases, behaviors carry specific meanings which may vary across cultures. When teachers are not aware of cultural differences, when they assume that a behavior has a particular meaning while students assume it has another, then there is a misunderstanding--a breakdown in communication. One basic reason for the failure of Puerto Rican students in mainland classrooms is the lack of communication between them and their Anglo teachers--due to a lack of crosscultural sensitivity. The purpose of this research project was to find evidence of culture conflicts, resulting in miscommunication between Puerto Rican students and Anglo students. Four classes in a Boston public school were observed and tape recorded, and information compiled on Puerto Rican culture and the Anglo teacher subculture. The findings encompassed instances of miscommunication manifested by the behavior of the students and teachers which could be explained by their respective cultural norms. [This document has been reproduced from the best available copy.] (Authors/RJ)

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CROSSCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM*

by

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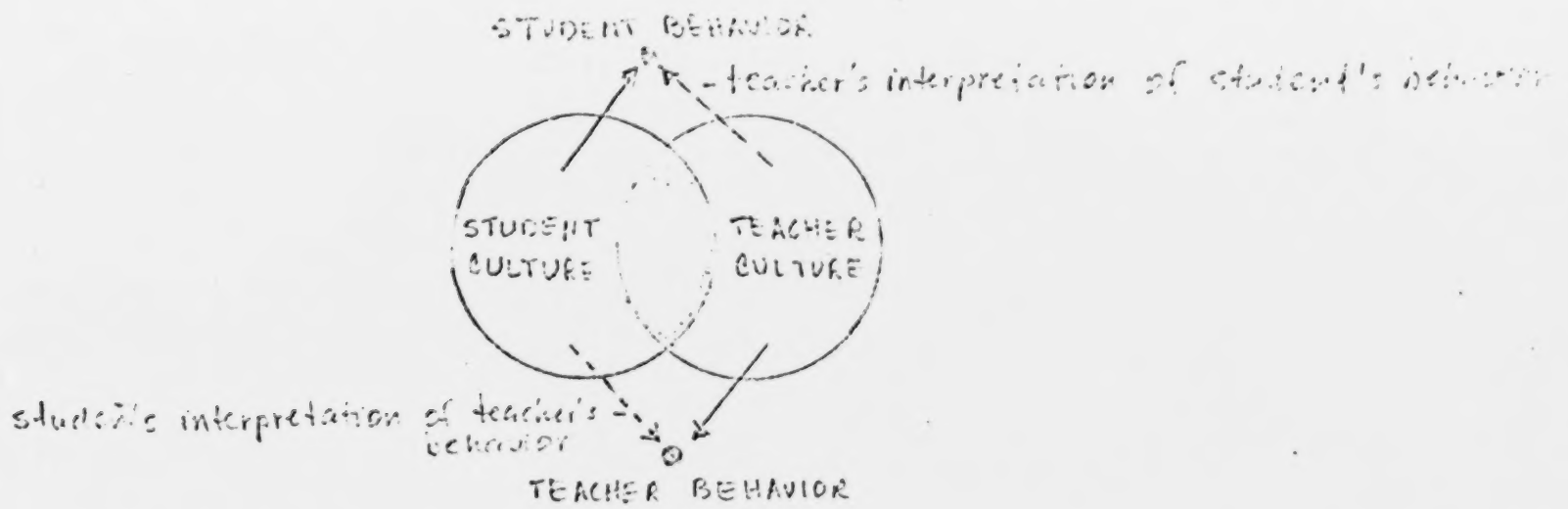
Paper presented at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology and the American Ethnological Society, Montreal, Quebec.
April 8, 1972

UD 012482

* This research was supported by Ford Foundation Grant No. 700-0656 to the Language Research Foundation, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

INTRODUCTION

Communication between students and teachers is the basic requirement for learning to take place in a classroom. Like words and phrases, behaviors carry specific meanings which may vary across cultures. When students assume that a behavior has a particular meaning while students assume it has another, then there is a misunderstanding — a breakdown in communication. The relationship between cultural differences and the interpretation of behavior can be illustrated simply:



One basic reason for the "failure" of Puerto Rican students in Mainland classrooms is miscommunication between them and their Anglo* teachers, due to a lack of crosscultural sensitivity. On this assumption, a project was undertaken to isolate the specific points of cultural conflict between Anglo teachers and Puerto Rican students that affect interaction in the classroom. This information was to be used to develop a teacher training curriculum to improve student-teacher communication in the classroom. We will discuss here only the research phase of the project.

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* The term "Anglo" is used because Puerto Ricans are also United States citizens, and therefore the terms "American" or "U.S." are ambiguous.

The general research design included the following aspects: a literature survey on Puerto Rican culture, a survey on the Anglo teacher subculture, and classroom observation and taperecording.

Puerto Rican Culture Literature Survey. This included those aspects of Puerto Rican culture that we considered relevant to Puerto Rican children's behavior in United States Mainland elementary schools: parents' world view, parents' attitudes toward education, early socialization practices (sex roles, discipline, learning style in the home), life style. As a check on the inadequacies of the literature, we asked Puerto Rican graduate students to review our findings from the literature and correct, modify or add to them.

Teacher Subculture Survey. This was to have been done by other Project staff, but was not completed before the scheduled classroom observations. Because of the intricate school negotiations involved in setting up our classroom observation and taperecording schedule, the schedule could not be changed. Therefore, we extracted data we had gathered from our taperecordings of on-site informal conversations with teachers whose classes we had observed, in order to get a more concrete idea of the teacher's point of view.

Classroom Obervation and taperecording. We observed two classrooms, a first grade and a fifth grade. Each classroom had two teachers: a "regular" teacher , who worked with the children who knew most English, and the "bilingual" teacher, who spoke Spanish and worked with the children who spoke very little English. Each classroom had between 20 and 30 students. These were divided almost equally between the two teachers. We taperecorded each observation session, using a wireless

microphone for the teacher and a directional microphone to pick up the class. The microphones fed into a stereo tuner which fed into a stereo taperecorder. The equipment was placed in the back of the classroom, and the children soon lost interest in it.

We will first discuss the findings from the teacher study, then the communication breakdowns from the taped classroom observations. As many tape transcriptions as possible are included in the discussion.

TEACHER CRITERIA FOR JUDGING STUDENTS

Rationale

A teacher has certain criteria for judging her students regardless of ethnic group or social class. These criteria emerge from the teacher's ideal conception of children's performance. If she has no understanding of cultural difference (as opposed to "cultural deprivation"), she will use her own cultural norms as the basis for these criteria. If the children do not perform or generally behave according to those criteria, the children will rate low in the teacher's judgment. This low rating will, in turn, affect her expectations and her interaction with the students.

In the light of the previous work we had done on the Puerto Rican culture survey and on communication breakdowns in the classroom, we predicted that the Anglo teachers would fault Puerto Rican children on certain aspects of their behavior.

The purpose of this substudy was to discover the Anglo teachers' criteria for judging students in order to find out whether or not the teacher's opinion of

Puerto Rican students reflected her own cultural norms for children's behavior in class, and thus show that Puerto Rican children are handicapped in their relationship with the teacher.

DATA

We looked at all the data we had on recorded free conversations with the teachers whose classes we had previously observed. The teachers are:

T-1 - First Grade, third year as a provisional teacher. No experience with Puerto Rican children. Twenty-Four years old. Single.

T-2 - First Grade, two years permanent teacher. Three years experience with Puerto Rican children. Twenty-Five years old. Married to an Anglo.

T-3 - Third Grade, Eight years permanent teacher. No experience with Puerto Rican children. Twenty-Nine years old. Single.

T-4 - Fifth Grade, three years permanent teacher. No experience with Puerto Rican children. Twenty-Five years old. Married to an Anglo.

ANALYSIS

It is very difficult to find a way to draw any strong conclusions from this type of data. At best, we can infer teachers' criteria from the data and hypothesize whether or not Puerto Rican students are handicapped by the use of these criteria and why. However, the discussion of these inferences and hypotheses may contribute ideas or direction for future systematic research on crosscultural student-teacher interaction.

Three criteria for judging students emerge from the data. The quotes from which these criteria were inferred are listed below each criterion. After each set of criterion-and quotes is a discussion of the probable rating of Puerto Rican children on the criterion, based on our previous survey of Puerto Rican culture.

A. EFFORT, AGRESSIVENESS AND LEADERSHIP. Good students participate aggressively in class activities, show initiative, attend class regularly, and work steadily on classwork and homework.

Quotes:

T-1

I switched M. to the slow reading group. He's bright but he just sits. He knows them (words) but he's just lazy, rather than look at it [illegible] think. Incredible.

So many Puerto Rican kids are on Welfare; they're born lazy. The Chinese are so different. They're smart, good workers, and they do what you say.

The first year I taught, my kids had a lot of character; they were unreal, jumping around wanting to do things. Puerto Ricans are very quiet, especially in the beginning. As a rule they're shy and quiet. These kids (Puerto Ricans) in the beginning were deadbeats. The black kids from the beginning were jumping around.

I don't want to send them (her Puerto Rican students) to Miss S.'s class. She would't push them. She has a problem class and her aide is weak.

(Interviewer: What recommendations would you make that would help other teachers who have Puerto Rican students?)

Give them enough to be challenging, but really, really drill them a lot, even in the second grade. Start right with the basics. Once in a while they're not thinking.

(Interviewer: Is it because they don't speak English that...)

Yes, but also they're lazy too.

In the first grade aggressiveness is important -- aggressiveness means smartness, at least initially.

C.'s brother, for example, still doesn't say a word. I. perked up because he went to Puerto Rico - someone is taking care of him.

T-2

C. is the worst child in this class. She's immature; she doesn't want to do anything.

(Interviewer: Who is the best child in the class?)

A. She likes to play teacher.

T-3

I have 13 Spanish kids in the room; that's about half. They all came from that special school; they don't feel like doing anything.

I have to do reading in the morning and even then, they didn't feel like doing anything.

They like arithmetic. If they don't do it, it's because they're lazy.

T-4

The children clam up whey you (interviewer) enter the room.

H. is slow. He's Indian. He doesn't try. I'd call him stupid, but you're not supposed to.

Puerto Rican Students generally rate low on effort and class participation. I.e., they are considered lazy. Below are some alternative explanations to the explanation of "natural laziness".

1. Puerto Rican students have high absenteeism rates (CB p. 12) because children are often kept home from school by their parents who have asked them to do other things at home. Children will not be sent to school if they cannot be dressed properly. Also, Puerto Ricans visit their relatives in other

cities and in Puerto Rico relatively often, even in the middle of the school year.

2. Work required at home takes precedence over school work. If there is housework to be done or some errand to run, homework is neglected (CB p. 13).

3. The young child in a Puerto Rican family is regarded as "sin capacidad" (literally, without capacity) i.e., without the ability to think for himself. (FWP 5.2.1) Children are told what to do and are expected to do only as they are told. Thus children are trained not to display initiative, which, unfortunately for Puerto Rican children, is required in Anglo culture.

4. Girls especially are extremely timid. Girls are considered inferior and weaker than boys and in need of protection from the male world. They are usually not permitted to leave the house unless chaperoned, even when they are old enough to do so. They learn to feel shy towards people who are not members of the family.

5. Puerto Rican children suffer "culture shock" during the first weeks or even months of residence in the United States. One of the main symptoms is "withdrawal", i.e., refusal to talk or participate in any activity.

B. CONDUCT. While children should participate to the fullest in class activities, they should do so in the manner set forth by the teacher. They should not do anything that interferes with the teacher's control of the class, e.g., shouting out answers without being called upon. Nor should they do anything that violates the teacher's rules for proper classroom behavior, such as telling another student the answer.

T-1

I have 32 kids. It's unreal; everyone screams the answers.

T-2

I'm lucky I have M. (her Puerto Rican aide). She takes care of all the discipline problems.

T-3

They (the Puerto Rican children) all went through the bilingual class last year and they're troublemakers. The teacher in the bilingual class let them do whatever they wanted, so they haven't learned how to behave in a classroom.

The girls are good; there are no complaints with them except for the fresh one...

But it's not just these children. A. (black child) was suspended for three days... Then there's T. (Anglo child) with his temper fits... There's ten of them.

T-4

My kids are no trouble at all. They're all quiet, too quiet sometimes.

While these conduct criteria may be quite effective and appropriate for students who share the teachers' cultural norms, they conflict with Puerto Rican socialization norms.

Boys are usually rated much lower than girls on conduct, because they are in fact much more "troublesome" than girls.

1. Because of the emphasis on "machismo" in Puerto Rican culture, boys feel they must show their superiority, and this can be done by "making trouble" in class. A teacher who does not know the subtle ways of disciplining a Puerto Rican boy, will not be respected and therefore be taken advantage of.

2. The other main culture shock sympton is hyperactivity according to a Puerto Rican psychiatrist who has studied the problem extensively.

3. In the Puerto Rican home the learning atmosphere is one of cooperation rather than competition. Older children are expected to help younger siblings in the home; if something goes wrong, all the children are blamed and therefore all are encouraged to help each other. This style is carried over into the classroom where it is often misinterpreted by the teacher as cheating or not allowing others to learn for themselves.

4. Puerto Rican parents are firm and authoritative; they do not spare the rod and are seldom persuaded to change

their minds. Children are expected to obey their parents at all times and are seldom given reasons other than that they should do as they are told. The father is the authority in the home and is feared and respected. Because of the strictness at home, if Puerto Rican children, especially the boys, see that a young teacher doesn't quite know how to handle a large class, they will take advantage of the situation. The threat that usually works with Puerto Rican children is "I will tell your father if you don't stop that," rather than screaming at the child.

C. COMPETENCE IN SCHOOL SKILLS. This criterion doesn't seem to pose a crosscultural problem, except when it is confounded with language proficiency, which, in an Anglo teacher's classroom means English proficiency.

T-1

In the beginning they couldn't do a thing.

Harry is a slow learner; he couldn't speak a word of English all of last year.

I didn't know who could speak English and who couldn't...

Black kids catch on much faster in reading, writing, arithmetic and letters.

T-2

(Interviewer: Who do you think is the best child in the class?)

A. She is repeating the grade, but knows English.

They have difficulty with arithmetic because they cannot deal with abstractions; arithmetic deals directly with abstractions.

T-3

E. is not very bright. He's been in school here for maybe three years and he's never learned to read, and he's just far back in everything.

T-4

These children don't think; they're stupid. I usually have to give them the answers.

I concentrate on English and reading. Other subjects are just a way to teach English.

Before the advent of bilingual education, education of non-English speaking children consisted of first teaching the children English and then teaching them subject matter in English. Thus, the time spent learning enough English to understand what was going on in class — about a year — was lost time academically, and the Puerto Rican students fell behind their Anglo classmates in subject matter. Anglo teachers also spent a lot of time correcting the speech of these students, and in the process of trying to teach them faultless grammar, obscured the concepts they were trying to teach.

Puerto Rican children who come from rural areas and are placed, say, in the third grade or higher, usually have not had education comparable to that of Anglo children. They, therefore, do not have the basic skills

and concepts of reading and arithmetic that Anglo teachers assume they should have. Unfortunately, this lack of education is usually interpreted as a natural inability to deal with abstractions.

The above presentation of teachers' criteria appears to be an indictment of teachers. In a regular middle class self-contained classroom, these criteria are probably the ones that allow the teacher to function most effectively. For example, fostering competition among students is very much a part of Anglo culture and would thus probably work quite well with Anglo students. However, the different norms of Puerto Rican culture make these criteria inappropriate for Puerto Rican children. These comments, are, in effect, an appeal to teachers to give non-Anglo students who appear to be lazy, disruptive, stupid, etc., by Anglo judgment criteria, the benefit of the doubt.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS

As we mentioned in the Introduction, communication breakdowns are those instances of misinterpretation of behavior that result from conflict between a teacher's cultural norms and that of a student. From our classroom observations and taperecordings, we discovered three types of communication breakdowns:

1. General breakdowns
2. Language breakdowns
3. Cultural breakdowns.

They are discussed separately below. We had not planned to research the first two, but they emerged from our data and are clearly appropriate within the context of this study.

GENERAL BREAKDOWNS

General breakdowns are the kinds of breakdowns that can occur in any classroom. They are not due to differences in language and culture between a teacher and her students. Instead, they are due more to the teaching style of each individual teacher and to the classroom environment she has created. Specifically, the kinds of breakdowns that are included here are not due to the fact that it was an Anglo teacher working with Puerto Rican students.

The problems of discipline in a classroom create many misunderstandings between teachers and students. T1 had a special way of trying to create order in her classroom. She first used an indirect discipline method with her students; that is, she would not address them personally, but would instead refer to them in the third person. She did this in two ways: it was either 'Pedro is good, I like Pedro'; or 'Pedro is bad, I don't like Pedro!' The positive, praising method worked -- students wanted their names to be mentioned in a positive sense. The negative method, 'I don't like Pedro', did not work. The student who was being mentioned would simply ignore the comment and continue behaving the same way he had been before it was made. The following examples

illustrate this form of discipline.

(1,A,46-66) T1 uses indirect discipline method -- talks about students (S's) in third person; then changes to a more direct discipline method.

T1: "I'm waiting for Madeleine; I love Georgie, he looks all ready to go; I like Juan, he looks ready; I like... José looks very ready."
S: "I'm ready."
S: "I'm ready."
T1: "William, you're not ready though."
T1: "This group I expect to be ready."
T1: "Cleto you don't look ready at all."

(2,B,183-185) T1: "I like Daisy and Jacqueline because they are listening."

(2,B,192-195) T1: "I didn't like the way Luis was paying attention to the words; I didn't like William and Madeleine. They were looking all around. And when they read now I'm going to know that they didn't listen. They won't know the words, will they?"

T1 uses the same indirect third person discipline method as on Tape 1, Side A, 46-66.

When this discipline method failed, T1 would resort to more direct methods, such as making students stand in the corner. This created problems in a classroom which had two teachers in it, because T2 (the other teacher in the room) would see the students out of their seats and standing in the corner, and she would tell them to go sit down. Thus a conflict arose by one teacher (unknowingly) reversing the other teacher's punishment. T1 also used other methods of punishment as the following example illustrates.

T1 turns the lights off and makes all the S's put their heads on their desks as a punishment.

(1,A,444-448) T1: "Do I dare to put even one on?"
S's: "Ya."
T1: "All right, let's see. And do you think we can be quiet?"
S's: Mixture of ya's and no's.

T1: "At least 'til T1 can explain what we're going to do."

Trying to create order in a classroom creates special kinds of misunderstandings. Behavior and knowledge often get confused. Children are rewarded for their good behavior, at times when they should be rewarded for good word, or for how much they know. One specific example of this kind of breakdown is the problem of timing. A student must answer a teacher's question when the teacher wants it answered, and how she wants it answered. The teacher will only call on the student who raises his hand to answer her question. If someone else shouts out an answer, it will not be accepted, whether or not it is correct. The following examples illustrate the point.

(1,A,91-94) T1: "I'm going to ask Priscilla because she raised her hand. Nobody else."
T1: "We're not going to have anyone tell the answer who doesn't raise their hand."

Emphasis on order rather than correct answer.

(1,A,106-108) T1: "Only Harry, I only heard Harry; that's all. 'Cause Harry was the only one that had his hand up!"
S's: "And me too and me too."
S: "Y yo tambien." (and me too)

(1,A,115) S shouts out answer.

T1: "No, Eduardo, I'm not ready."

Again, timing is of supreme importance.

(1,A,126-127) T1: "No, Priscilla, I didn't ask, so I don't hear you."

After Priscilla shouts out correct answer. Her timing was off.

(1,A,252-253) T1: "Maria, I didn't ask for the answer. I said, 'we're going to take away how many?' Priscilla."

Priscilla: "Two."
T1: "Thank you. You're the only one who can raise your hand."

This conflict of order vs. knowledge extends to such classroom activities as reading groups. Students progress from a "slower" to a "brighter" reading group only if their behavior is adequate. ("Brighter" and "slower" are T1's own words.) Reading ability is important for advancement, also, but behavior seems to play a very important role. The advanced, or "brighter", reading group becomes the prestige group, and it is often used as a prize for students who behave well. Similarly, a student in the advanced group might be demoted if his behavior deteriorates.

(1,A,190-191) T1: "This group, right here, the smartest group in the class sometimes, but also the worst behaved."

Does this imply that they are not the smartest group in the class when they are misbehaving?

(2,B,591-593) T1: "You know, Miguel, I'm going to take you and put you in the other reading group. I'm not kidding."

T1 uses reading groups as rewards and punishments. S's know which group is better than the other, and they are often reminded of this. Uses threat of lowering S from "brighter" to "slower" group as a tactic to get him to work. This tactic does not work very well. S behaves the same as he did before. There is a very definite prestige reading group, and thus a fairly clear-cut division in the class.

(5,A,96-98) T1 to Luis: "You keep up the good work and stop fooling around, I might put you in the other group -- really. You gotta stop fooling. O.K. Eduardo. You, too, but you fool aroung too much.

Again, T1 uses the "brighter" reading group as a reward, making it the prestige group. It's not the good work as much as the no fooling around that will get you into the "brighter" reading group.

The result of having a prestige group is that students in one group resent those in the other and the teacher, consciously or not, will treat children in the various groups differently. This differential treatment of students can be very harmful to a first-grade student.

(3,A,288-289) Luis, from the other group, and Anibal are fighting. T1 tells Anibal nicely to sit down. Luis yelled at. T1 has very angry expression on her face when talking to Luis.

T1: "Anibal, please sit down. And LUIS."

(5,A,114-116) Eduardo and Anibal, who's from the other reading group, are fighting.

T1: "Eduardo, right over here. Right over here. Anibal, don't bother us, O.K., when we're studying."

Notice the difference in the tone of her voice when she yells at Eduardo and when she speaks to Anibal.

Another result of the attempt to keep order in the classroom above anything else is that a student will be reprimanded for showing some initiative, if he does it at the wrong time. Again, timing is important.

(2,B,301-303) T1: "Jacqueline, will you read the next page, please. Eduardo, you read already; there are people who haven't read at all yet. And you're sitting here not paying attention. Now, look here."

Eduardo volunteers to read, unlike most of the other children. He is put down for his effort.

(2,B,321-323) T1: "O.K., Luis, now stop it. Now I want you to follow when everybody else reads, too, instead of just raising your hand and wanting to read. Do you want a ...(unclear)? Now you read that page and stop talking."

Again, raising your hand and asking to read does not pay off. S's initiative was put down.

Teachers frequently give away answers to the questions they ask. In many cases, they do more than give away the answer -- they answer it themselves.

(1,A,114-114) T1 asks if students know what a certain shape is.

"It's not a square, it's a rec..."
S shouts out "rectangle".

(2,B,274-277) T1 asks question: "What does Dot want? What does she want?"
S: "A toy."
T1: "What is it? A mask. Something you put on your face."

T1 asks question, and then answers it herself, with an explanation. She doesn't seem to expect the S's will be able to answer her question. She ignores the answer one S gives, not saying whether it is right or wrong, and if it's wrong, why.

(4,2,244-249) T3: "What's a black cat?"
Anthony: "Bad luck."
T3: "Is it really bad luck?"
S: "No."
T3: Do you think it is?"
S: "No."
T3: Do you think it is?"
S: "No."
T3: "No. What do you think it is? It's just a what?"
S: "A cat."
T3: "Yeah, but can you think of the word that's called that? It's a super... Superstiti..."
Anthony: "...stition."
T3: "Superstition. Right. Black cats are superstition."

T3 asks a question and answers it herself.

Students quickly pick up on the question and answer game. They frequently answer the question the way the teacher wants it to be answered. Not only that, they get so good at it that they can eventually anticipate the teacher's next question. The following examples will illustrate these two situations.

(4,2,30-33) T3 asks what they were talking about. Mildred answers "the daytime star", instead of saying the sun. T3 then has to ask "What's the daytime star? What's the daytime star?" Somebody finally says it's the sun. S's are answering what T3 wants to hear.

(6,4, 7-190) T4 asking S's questions about words written on the blackboard that have the same initial consonant sound, or the same ending. S's anticipate T4's questions to the point that she finally says:
"That's my next question. What do they all have in common?"

Finally, the whole question of grades can create misunderstandings. The conflict that arises here is one of knowledge vs. grades. Is a student studying to learn something, or is he simply trying to get good grades? Who knows?

(4,2,193-201) T3: "You have to add what you think is important and what you think will make you remember the whole two pages. But they have to be short and brief and you look nervous and it won't be graded. Just to help you learn, we're just learning now. We just need practice. All right, any questions?"
Orlando: "NO."
T3: "No. No questions? You look perplexed. No? All right. Try it. We'll talk about them tomorrow. What you come up with. Try it. Go ahead and do this right now. You can do this with my permission before you finish some of those things. It should only take you about 10 minutes."

S's have no need to worry. They are not being graded on this exercise, they are only doing it to "learn".

LANGUAGE BREAKDOWNS (LB's)

These breakdowns are due to the fact that the first language of the teachers we observed was English, while the first language of the students was Spanish. Although the teachers spoke some Spanish, and most of the students spoke some English, there were still many problems. The LB's are usually due to the fact that the students didn't understand what the teacher had said, or the teacher did not understand what the student had said. Students frequently gave correct answers in Spanish to the teacher's questions, but the teacher ignored these, either because she didn't understand them, or she would not accept them.

One LB which frequently appeared in the first grade was that the students gave Spanish answers to T1's English questions.

A very clear example of this can be found when T1 is working with her reading groups. T1 made up flash cards with the new words which were going to appear in the course of their reading. She would frequently cover up some of the letters of the words and then would ask the students what the new word was. Students would take the sounds T1 was using and would make Spanish words out of them.

(2,B,19-22)

T1: "What's this word; who can sound this word out? This says stop and if I take the s off it's s..."
S's: "S..., sa..., sapo, sapo." (Sapo is frog in Spanish)
T1: "It's a t, there's a t."
S: "Sa..."
T1: "No, what does t say?"

Students don't understand T1's directions at all. They are using the initial sound of the word to make a Spanish word out of it, as in the case of sapo. T1 ignores these responses, either because she doesn't hear them, or doesn't understand them. In either case, she does not appear to know what the S's are doing, just like the S's don't know what she is asking for.

(2,B,48-51) Word is supposed to be play. T1 asks what happens if you take the p off -- one S responds playa, which is the Spanish word for beach. T1 ignores this response.

In these examples, T1 ignores the Spanish responses. Occasionally, she would accept one, and then correct it.

(2,B,153-155) T1 and S's: "But."
S: "Bate." (Spanish word for bat).
T1: "No, just but, William."

Here, T1 has heard what William has said, and has corrected him with no explanation. The child does not know what he has done wrong. T1 has chosen to acknowledge the Spanish word William has said, and has corrected him. Again, it is not possible to tell whether or not she knows what William has done. (I.e., use the sounds he is supposed to produce, and make a Spanish word out of them.)

Another LB which occurs is one in which the students simply don't understand the teacher's instructions.

(1,A,365-550) S's are to make valentines and put names of other people in the class on them. T1 has written the names of all the students on the blackboard. S's are to put valentines in a box, and these valentines will be distributed at a St. Valentine's Day party the following day. S's put their own names on valentines, because they don't understand the teacher's instructions.

(1,A,458) T1 repeats instructions for making valentines again. Uses language that is too hard for S's to understand.

(1,A,470-472) T1: "And then you can put your name. Or you can put a ? so they won't know who it's from. A surprise."
None of the S's put a ?.

(1,A,543-549) T2: "They're putting their own names on."
T1: "I figured they would."
T1, to the class: "You put somebody else's name on it; not your name. Put on both names. You don't want to send a valentine to yourself. To Miss G. from Miss G."
T2: "Everybody knows you love yourself."

As can be seen by this last excerpt from the tapes, T1 did not expect her students to understand her instructions, and yet she really didn't try to clarify them.

An example of instructions which the teacher thinks are easy, and which the students didn't understand, can be found in the following excerpt from a fifth grade reading class with T3.

(4,2,3-12) T3: "Now read the directions; you should be able to do these without me. These have very easy directions for you to understand."

T3 says this, then goes on to read and explain directions.

T3: "Pick 'a' or 'b'; what does it mean; what moral does it give us? We talked about those yesterday, 'member? About the dog yesterday who went and grabbed the meat and the ocean and he dropped his own piece, 'cause he was too greedy? O.K. Um, do you think it's true, why or why not. Give an example to prove your answer. And the two you can talk about either 'a' or 'b' are "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched' and 'Haste makes waste.'"

This is an example of clear," easy to understand" directions.

Sometimes, the teacher will say something that will make no sense to a student, and is probably saying it more for herself than for the student.

(1,A,332) T1: "Priscilla, I don't know if you could ever work in a bank."

What does this mean to a 7-year old first grader?

In many cases, if the teacher doesn't think her students understand her, she will try to use Spanish to make it more understandable. All four teachers did this at least once on the tapes.

(6,B,106-115) T2 asks Ana to come up and put a bundle of 10 sticks in either the one's house or the ten's house. Ana doesn't know what she's supposed to do.

T2: "This is one ten, so which house am I going to put it in, Ana?"
Ana: "Ten."
T2: "Go ahead. Put it in this house. Where do you want to put it -- do you want to put it in the ten's house or the one's house? Ana, where are you going to put that bundle? Which house?"
S's yelling in the background: "Ten, ten, ten."
T2: "Shh. Oh that's sp ..."
S: "¿En cual casa?" (In which house?)
T2: "Yeah. ¿En que casa va a poner?" (In which house are you going to put?)
S: "¿En cual casa va a poner [unclear]?"
T2: "All right, put it in. Just put it up here. Zoom. Good!"

It seems that Ana knew all along what she was supposed to do, but didn't understand what T2 was saying. When her classmates, and then T2, translated T2's instructions into Spanish, then she did what she was asked to.

The previous example is taken from a first grade arithmetic lesson in which T2 is trying to teach the meaning of place and order of numbers, by using a "one's house" and a "ten's house". Many of her students did not understand the lesson, and T2 realizes this. Later on, she acknowledges the fact that certain students don't understand what is going on.

(6,B,144-145) T2 turns to S who obviously doesn't understand. "Pedro, will you please watch, even though you don't understand me, for a minute?"

(6,B,187-190) T2 turns to S who is making noise.

T2: "I think we'll have to do this with the little sticks, because Luis Soto doesn't

have any idea what is going on. Furthermore, he doesn't even care, do you Luis?"

Starts asking Luis questions in Spanish. Finally gets a response out of him.

What happens very often is that the teacher's Spanish is not very good, and her students will try to help her out.

(6,A,47-49) T4 tries to speak in Spanish -- to translate what she has said in English for those S's who speak very little English. Her pronunciation is very bad and her vocabulary is limited. S's are constantly correcting her.

(6,A,197-199) T4: "This is two sentences, dos sentencias de la, del cuento, O.K.? Two sentences from the story."

T4 uses wrong word in Spanish. Correct word for sentence is 'oración', and not 'sentencia'. T4 does this throughout the tape.

Another example of how teachers mispronounce Spanish words is found when the teachers say their students' names.

(2,B,321-323) T1 mispronounces Luis -- she calls him Lewis. This is a common mistake Anglo teachers make, not only with the name Luis, but also with others such as Ramon, Pedro, etc. Teachers should learn how to pronounce their students' names, instead of Anglicizing them.

Even though the teachers speak Spanish so poorly, they frequently correct the syntax and pronunciation of their students when they (the students) speak English. After all, they are in school to learn how to speak "good" English.

(6,A,16-21) S: "I finish."
T4: "You what? You finished?"
S: "Yeah."
T4: "Say: 'I finished.'"
S: "I finish."

T4: "I finished."
S: "I finished."
T4: "He, she finished."
S: "He, she finished."

T4 frequently corrects syntax and pronunciation of her S's throughout the tape.

(4,2,365-367) Anthony: "He mad. Miguel mad."
T3: "He is mad. Not he mad."
Anthony: "He is not mad."

Anthony overcorrected T3's correction.

The teachers frequently don't allow Spanish answers. Not only that, they sometimes don't allow any Spanish to be spoken at all.

(7,2,112-115) T3 begins to work with the "Banana Splits". She's waiting for Anthony and Stephen to get there. Ramonita and Raquel are already sitting with her, and they speak to each other in Spanish.

T3: "No Spanish! No Spanish!"

Occasionally, a student will answer a question correctly, but in Spanish. This answer will more often than not be overlooked.

(2,B,64-66) T1: "Hop, hop up. Who can hop up and down?"
S: "El conejo." (The rabbit)
T1: "The frog."
S: "El conejo tambien." (The rabbit, also)

S's answer was correct. T1 ignored it. She ignored it because it was in Spanish, because she could not understand it, or because she did not hear it. In any case, S knows he's right and so he repeats his answer, and says, "The rabbit (can hop) also." He gives an alternative answer which is also correct, and yet it was ignored.

Finally, students sometimes answer a question incorrectly, simply because they didn't hear it correctly.

(4,2,306-307) T3: "Mound. What's the mound?" (Talking about the pitcher's mound in baseball)
Anthony: "A candy bar."
T3: "That's Mounds. What's a mound?"

CULTURAL BREAKDOWNS (CB's)

The second kind of breakdowns are cultural breakdowns (CB's). These breakdowns are due to the fact that a student may act in a way which reflects his own culture, C1. This part of culture C1 may be different from the teacher's culture, C2. If this part of C1 is different from C2, then the teacher will misinterpret the child's action. She is interpreting using C2, and this will lead to an incorrect interpretation. The teacher will then respond to this action using the norms of culture C2, which in turn will be misinterpreted by the student.

These are the hardest kinds of breakdowns to pinpoint. It is very difficult to say whether a certain action of a student is due to his (or his parents') fatalistic beliefs, or to the strict sex-role differentiation which exists in his culture, or whatever. The best one can do is to hypothesize which of the aspects of the student's culture, or the teacher's culture, <u>might</u> be influencing the student, or the teacher, to act in a certain way.

In the Puerto Rican home, the learning atmosphere is one of cooperation, not competition. This concept of cooperation goes against the learning environment of most American

classrooms. In these classrooms, every student is expected to do the best he can working by himself. A strong feeling of competition develops, and every student feels he should do well at the expense of every other student in the class. This feeling is alien to Puerto Rican culture. The Puerto Rican child tries to do well, but never at the expense of anyone else. Older children are expected to help younger siblings in the home. This feeling of cooperation is carried over into the classroom, where it is often misinterpreted by the Anglo teacher, who labels it as cheating. The Anglo teacher does not allow cooperation among her students, and will try to discourage it whenever she can. The following examples will illustrate the point.

(2,A,103-105) T1: "Don't help him; you're helping him. You've got big mouths you two. You're not supposed to tell."

This may be considered a communication breakdown, particularly a cultural breakdown. In Puerto Rican families, there is much cooperation among siblings, and this is also true among friends. The S's probably found nothing wrong with helping each other. This behavior is often misinterpreted by the Anglo teacher, who calls it "cheating".

(2,A,240-243) T1: "C'mon, Miguel only. Only Miguel. Cleto, when I say only Miguel does that mean Cleto, too? All right, Miguel, the next one; just Miguel."

Miguel gives the correct word.

T1: "All right, let's hear you every time."

T1 embarrasses Miguel in front of reading group by criticizing his lack of participation. She also does not allow Cleto to help his friend.

(2,B,555-563) T1: "What's that Miguel? What is it? We just did it. You're lazy. It's a whiz. C-a-t spells cat. What does 'c' say? It says 'k', 'k'. What happens if I take the 'c' off?"
S's: "At, at."

T1: "At. Miguel you; Miguel now, just Miguel."
T1: "Now just Miguel again."
T1: "Don't tell him I'm gonna be mad."

Again, T1 has not allowed cooperation among the S's by not letting others help Miguel.

(3,B,140-142) T1: "C'mon, let's hear Miguel now, O.K. and let's everybody follow and don't tell him. Miss T1 will help him, O.K.? Don't tell him. Let's go."

By now, T1 knows the others will help Miguel if he needs it, and she assumes he will need it. Therefore, she warns them in advance not to do it.

There is only one time on the tapes where a teacher actually allows cooperation.

(7,2,98-100) End of work with "Flintstones" group. S's are sent back to their seats to do some work based on reading they have just done. T3 allows cooperation: "And you can help each other find them, if you want."

This is the first time on any of the tapes where this has happened.

Another problem common among Puerto Rican students is their high absenteeism rates. This is related to their parents' attitude towards education. Children are often kept home from school because their parents have asked them to do other things that take precedence over going to school, such as babysitting (FWP 4.3). Also, children will not be sent to school if they can not be dressed properly (FWP3.2.2.1). The teachers we observed didn't really understand why their Puerto Rican students were absent so often. They condemned the children and severely penalized them for their high absenteeism.

(2,B,385-397) T1: "Luis, you're going to have to stay with me for a little extra help at a quarter to two today; after math, because you don't come;

you'd better come to school every day. Do you understand, Luis? You gonna come every day? 'Cause you weren't sick, were you, all that time. Was your mother sick? Why didn't you come? You just didn't want to come?"

Luis: "I went to the hospital. To the hospital."

T1: "You went where?"

Luis: "To the hospital."

T1: "You were in the hospital? To see who? You were in the hospital?"

T1 is questioning Luis, and can't get an excuse from him for not coming to school. Finally, Luis says he was in the hospital, but T1 doesn't believe him, because she asks, "To see who?" T1 lets it go at that. She doesn't realize that Luis might really have been in the hospital, or maybe he was needed at home, and his parents thought it was more important for him to stay home than to go to school. His high rate of absenteeism might be due to something much more important than just "You just didn't want to come."

(5,A,1-6) T1: "This is what happens when you don't come. That says Dot? Miguel, I'm warning you: you'd better pay really close attention. Let me, let me have him sit right here so I can grab him. C'mon. Right here. Sit right with me and you'd better look."

T1 moves Miguel next to her.

This attitude towards school attendance also carries over to the student's attitude towards doing homework. If there is some housework to be done, or some errand to run for a parent, the homework will be neglected.

(7,2,771-773) T3 is collecting homework.

T3: "You only did half of it? All right. Do it tonight."

S: "Because see, because see, I had to go to the store for my mother."

Going shopping takes precedence over doing homework. Her mother probably doesn't speak English.

The young child in a Puerto Rican family is regarded as "sin capacidad" (literally, without capacity), i.e., without the ability to think for himself. He is incapable of acting independently or of taking his own initiative (FWP 5.2.1). Since the teacher is considered to be a "second mother", the first-grade child is expected to learn from her, and she is supposed to tell him what to do. This attitude on the child's part is frequently taken to be laziness, or simply not thinking (i.e., "not using one's head"). The following examples illustrate a teacher's reaction to this sort of behavior.

(2,A,87-113) Eduardo having trouble reading many words. Tl has been helping him all along, but finally says: "C'mon Eduardo, you're not using your head today." (101-102)

(2,A,535-538) Tl: "C'mon Miguel. Good! Your problem is you get too much help. You wait for me to tell you. You're lazy."

In his home, Miguel waits for his parents to tell him. He is considered to be "sin capacidad" (loosely translated as without ability) since he is a child. He is probably not lazy, but is simply respecting the teacher's position.

(2,B,367-369) Luis Mendez is reading and having trouble.

Tl: "C'mon Luis, you're not using your head at all this morning. You know that word."

(5,A,242-248) Tl: "Luis, you don't...(unclear). Put your chair right here and stay and look at these cards. I'm so sick of you looking around. You're looking all around except over here; and you're going to fall behind, too (like Miguel, I guess). Now I'm tired of it. You and you you. (Points to Luis, Miguel and William.) All the time. You're just lazy. You're going to get fat (?) and lazy, Miguel. Let's go."

(Words in ( ) are my own comments.)

Ridiculing and punishing a Puerto Rican child, especially a male, in public, can create many problems in a classroom. Within the Puerto Rican family, children are rarely punished in public (FWP 5.3.4). Also, the preservation of personal dignity in the eyes of others is essential; exposure in public of one's personal shortcomings is anathema (FWP 3.2.2). Punishing a male publicly can be especially harmful, because boys are expected to be strong and aggressive (FWP 3.2.3 and 5.1.2). The Anglo teacher frequently misinterprets this aggressive behavior of the Puerto Rican boy, and then ridicules him in front of the whole class. The following examples show how Anglo teachers ridicule Puerto Rican boys, and in some cases they show the boy's reaction to this kind of treatment.

(1,B,6-8) T1: "Eduardo, that's beautiful; except that's <u>your</u> name. Are you sending a valentine to yourself? Eduardo is sending a valentine to himself."

The last sentence was said out loud to the whole class, thus ridiculing Eduardo publicly for his mistake.

(5,A,35-53) T1: "Do you know that word? All right, just Miguel now. Let's see if he knows it. It's gonna be a surprise word. Nobody say it, O.K.?"
Miguel: "Toys."
T1: "TOYS? 'Play'. The next time, you know, maybe if you say the next one, we can eat it. You think that says toys? All right, lemme see if he knows another one. Now, what is it? All right, now don't tell him. Don't tell him, now don't tell him."
T1: "'Dot', 'an' -- now look at it, there's no 'c'. If there was a 'c' here it would be 'can'. All right, let's see if you know another one. Just Miguel."
T1: "NOW LOOK AT IT AND USE YOUR HEAD. You've seen this word hundreds of times. What is it? Miguel, these are the easy cards. Everybody knows these. I'm going to make some for you and you're going to take them home, and if you

don't know them the next day, we're going to have you write them 100 times. Little cards for Miguel. Little special. Now, you too, Madeleine. You don't listen either. What is it?"
Madeleine: "Not."
T1: "Well see, even Madeleine knows it. What is it?"
Miguel: "Not."
T1: "Not. You do not listen. What's this one? We just had it, Miguel."
Miguel: "An."
T1: "An. And you only know it 'cause Ana said it. O.K., let's go. We're going to make you a special homework."

It's no wonder that Miguel doesn't come to school very often. This is a prime example of how a teacher can publicly embarrass and insult a child, and when a female Anglo teacher does it to a young Puerto Rican boy, the results could be disastrous. Miguel knew some of these words when he was sitting at his desk working alone, because George Williams heard him read them. When faced with this embarrassing and insulting situation, Miguel withdrew, and "forgot" them.

(5,A,217-223) T1: "Miguel, only Miguel. Don't make a face; you've got a head -- use it. You're gonna make me mad. What did I say that word...? 'Know'. What's this word? What's that word? You know, I'm going to have to help you special, Miguel and Madeleine. O.K.? Special help. C'mon, listen."

As can be seen by the previous examples, MIguel is very often ridiculed publicly. Also, he is frequently involved in situations where T1 thinks he is lazy and is not thinking, and she also thinks he gets too much help from his friends (see pages 11 and 14). It really is no wonder that Miguel doesn't come to school more often.

Another form of embarrassing a Puerto Rican boy is to compare him to a female. The following examples are very different, and yet they achieve the same effect.

(2,A,325-328) T1: "Priscilla, you're not looking. What is that word, Priscilla? Cleto, is your name Priscilla?"

By asking Cleto if his name is Priscilla, T1 has insulted his masculinity. This is very much against the rigid sex-role differentiation which exists in Puerto Rican culture. This is an example of a cultural breakdown.

(6,A,84-90)
T4: "Is Arameda big or little?"
S's: "Big."
Arameda: "I big."
T4: "Arameda, say it in a sentence now."
S: "Arameda big."
T4: "Arameda is big."
T4: "Is Tony big or little?"
S's: "Little."
T4 and S's: "Tony is little."
T4: "Tony is little, yeah. Is Miss T4 big or little?"
T4 and S's: "Miss T4 is big."
S: "Miss T4 is little."
T4: "I'm big! Miss T4 is big."

T4 is comparing heights. She has pointed out that Antonio, a male, is little, while Arameda, a female, is big. This must have upset Antonio.

The latter excerpt contains yet another example of how a teacher may put down a Puerto Rican boy. Anglicizing a boy's name is taking away part of his "caracter" (loosely translated as character and personality, but it means more than that. See FWP 3.2.1). Tony's name is really Antonio, and T4 says it on other parts of this tape. Also, Joseph is not a Spanish name; José is.

(6,A,34-35) T4: "O.K., number 5. Jose; Joseph."

The S's name is José. T4 has anglicized it to Joseph, and calls him Joseph through most of the tape. Here, T4 has slipped and first called him José -- she quickly corrects herself and changes it to Joseph.

While boys are expected to be strong and aggressive, girls are expected to be shy and submissive (FWP 5.1.2). Therefore, when a girl is praised publicly, she will appear to be embarrassed.

(5,A,20-22) T1: "And she'll read beautifully. 'Cause she's so smart. This one. You noticed. She's shy."

T1 was talking to [illegible] about Daisy. Daisy knew she was being praised, and so she hid her face in her hands. She was pleased, yet embarrassed.

The teacher is considered to be a "second mother". As such, she commands a great deal of respect. Children are admonished to obey the teacher (FWP 4.3). It is therefore wrong for a student to take the teacher's place, or for a student to sit in the teacher's seat. The teacher must always be obeyed and must always be treated with due respect. T4 obviously does not know that, or the following situation would not have occurred, and Antonio would not have been laughed at by his classmates.

(6,A,55-65) T4 is teaching possessives: Joseph's desk.

T4: "Tony you go sit in Joseph's desk. No, Tony. You go sit in my desk; Mrs. T4's desk."
S: "El desk de Mrs. T4." (Mrs. T4's desk.)
T4: "Go sit. Go sit in Mrs. T4's desk. Que quiere decir 'go sit'?" (What does 'go sit' mean?)
S: "El asiento de usted." (Your seat)
T4: "No, go; go."
S: "Que vaya." (That he should go)
S: "Que te vayas." (That you should go)
T4: Go ahead, go ahead."
S: "Vete." (Go)

(60)
(60) T4: "Go sit, go sit in Mrs. T4's desk. Miss T4's desk, heaven forbid."
S: "Vete, Tony." (Go, Tony)
S: "Me, teacher, me."

(62-63) T4: "Tony go sit in Miss T4's desk. Seat, I mean, seat. Where is it? Right. Go ahead. You can sit there. See, don't you feel like a teacher?"

Other S's laugh.

T4: "Go sit down."

This section of the tape has several interesting

examples of communication breakdowns. First of all, Tony's real name is Antonio, and T4 has undoubtedly changed it. Secondly, she's asking him to sit in her seat. T4 is the teacher, and thus commands a certain amount of respect. Consequently, her seat is special, and should only be occupied by her, and not by a student. Antonio knows what he's supposed to do, and yet is very hesitant to do so. Both his classmates and T4 have translated the instructions into Spanish. He is embarrassed by the situation and refuses to go for a long time. When he finally does go, the other S's laugh at him. He was being asked to do something he considered disrespectful. He is a student -- not a teacher.

Notice that T4 calls herself Mrs., until she corrects herself (60). This is probably due to the fact that her S's very often call her Mrs. (see Tape 6, Side B, 0-12). T4 eventually, and for no apparent reason, changes the word 'desk' to 'seat.' She has used the word 'desk' throughout the discussion, but then says: "seat, I mean, seat." (62-63)

Finally, a student will occasionally do something the teacher does not approve of, and the teacher will tell him so. But the student won't always understand or won't always agree with the teacher's objections.

(6,A,660-668) T4: "Wait a minute, what do I see in your mouth? What did I tell you about those. You don't know where that's been. It's probably been on the floor. It's like picking up a piece of food from the floor. Do you know you can get germs from that? All right. If you want to shuffle the cards, go ahead and shuffle 'em. But don't let me see any more of that stuff in your mouth. You too, José."

S's had chips from Bingo game in their mouths. T4 imposing her American middle class values of cleanliness on S's.